



MAPBD POSITION PAPER

Michigan Association for Pure Bred Dogs

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HOUSE BILL 4915

This bill changes the current holding periods at animal control shelters and animal protection shelters. It also creates a "sterilization release program" for cats.

MAPBD OPPOSES these sections of this bill for the following reasons:

HOLDING PERIODS

Holding periods, in both federal and state law, have been established to allow owners of lost or stolen pets time to retrieve their animals. This bill radically changes the holding periods making it more difficult, if not impossible, for pet owners, particularly cat owners, to ever recover their lost or stolen pets. Specifically:

HB 4915 states the holding period starts when the animal is taken in or, in the case of dogs taken in by an animal protection shelter, at the time they notify the animal control unit in its jurisdiction. Currently, the day of intake does not count. Thus, if an animal is taken in 15 minutes before closing time it is technically "accessible" to the rightful owner, even though, at that time, the owner may not know the animal is missing. This means the owner loses a day in attempting to locate a lost or stolen pet.

If a cat has not have current, traceable evidence of ownership the shelter may observe a "zero-day holding period" and immediately put the animal up for adoption. Most cat owners do not microchip their pets and the majority of cats do not wear collars. Nor are cats required by state law to be licensed. As a result, if the cat is "adoptable" or eligible for the "sterilization release program" the shelter immediately assumes ownership of the pet and the rightful owner has ZERO chance of ever recovering their pet, even if it was stolen. **THIS IS A TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE, UNCONSCIONABLE TAKING OF PROPERTY FOR THE PURPOSES OF MAKING A QUICK TURNOVER OF ADOPTABLE PETS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE RIGHTFUL OWNER.**

Quite remarkably, if an animal is deemed not adoptable or not a candidate for a "sterilization release program" the shelter will hold these animals (which no one will want) for 4 days.

This bill would PROHIBIT local units of government from mandating longer holding periods. In other words, cat owners would have NO RECOURSE to recover their property if it is deemed "adoptable" and ends up at a shelter.

STERILIZATION RELEASE PROGRAM

HB 4915 creates a "sterilization release program" for cats. At the same time, it mandates that local units of government cannot prohibit such programs. This is highly objectionable for the following reasons:

There is no scientific data that such catch, release, and sterilize programs are successful in reducing feral cat populations. In fact, because unsterilized cats continue to be added to the population each year these programs are ineffective. Furthermore, there is evidence to indicate that large populations of feral cats have a deleterious effect on songbird and other native species populations. Before such a program is sanctioned an environmental impact assessment should be conducted and input sought from the DNR and other interested conservation groups.

Large feral cat populations are unsustainable. For example, in the latest *MDARD Animal Shelter Annual Report* (2014), Lapeer County took in 812 cats. However, only 391 were returned to owners or adopted. These numbers are typical in many Michigan counties. Local residents of any community should not be prohibited from voicing objection if 421 or more unwanted cats per year (51% of the intake) were to be returned into their community as non-native, invasive pest animals rather than being humanely euthanized.

It is a sad fact that there are more cats than there are homes available. Additionally, most feral cats are not adoptable. As a result, these animals must be euthanized when brought into a shelter. A sterilization release program does nothing to solve the problem, although it artificially reduces published shelter euthanasia rates.

WHO PAYS? HB 4915 requires local communities to accept sterilization release programs without objection if implemented by any shelter. Only dog owners are required to be licensed. Yet, the majority of resources of most shelters go to the maintenance of cat populations. An additional, expensive sterilization release program by an animal control shelter cannot be financed solely on the money obtained from dog licenses. As a result, taxpayers, even those who do not own pets, would be required to foot the bill for hundreds and thousands of sterilization operations, as well as vaccinations and other medical costs.

Finally, MAPBD objects to sterilization release programs on the grounds that they are inhumane. According to ASPCA research, most feral cats are lucky to survive two years on their own. If an individual citizen found a feral cat, took it in, fed it, had it medicated and sterilized, and then dumped it back out into the community to fend for itself, he would be charged with animal abandonment or animal cruelty. We fail to see how the practice suddenly becomes "humane" when conducted on a large scale by either a municipal or private shelter.

MAPBD is a Michigan non-profit organization founded in 1964. MAPBD advocates responsible dog ownership and promotes fair and reasonable animal legislation in the state.

For more information contact MAPBD President Bob Darden: bobkdarden@hotmail.com